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ABSTRACT

Through observation, interviews, and a review of school documents in a small suburban elementary school, researchers sought information concerning how faculties make sense of a changeover in the principalship. The research was conducted from a cognitive perspective. The study found that teachers' views of administrative succession and the norms of the school affected the ways in which they made sense of events, while the circumstances surrounding the changeover and the succession process itself had little impact on their thinking. The teachers assumed changing the principal would bring significant changes to the school. Prior to the changeover, teachers expressed fear that they would lose autonomy and hope that the incoming principal would be personable and supportive. During the first few months of the new principal's tenure faculty reactions were positive, but transfer of the school's secretary led to a period of mistrust and criticism. Toward the end of the year teachers settled into an acceptance phase, but still anticipated significant changes that had not yet surfaced. A brief review of the literature on leader succession is incorporated into the report. (PGD)

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HOW A FACULTY MADE SENSE OF THE SUCCESSION OF ITS PRINCIPAL

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Paper presented at the the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, April 2, 1985.

HOW A FACULTY MADE SENSE OF THE SUCCESSION OF ITS PRINCIPAL

As the title suggests, we sought to describe how the faculty of an elementary school made sense of the succession, or change, of its principal. Changing principals is a relatively common and seemingly undramatic occurrence in America's public schools. Perhaps it is this apparent absence of drama that has led researchers to overlook the changing of principals as a subject worthy of study. However, two practical considerations suggest that there is a very real need to examine and understand what happens in schools when a change of principal is made. First, there is the matter of the beliefs on which practices of replacing and rotating principals are based. Second, we are entering a period of increased turnover in the ranks of the principalship.

It seems that people generally believe that good things happen to schools and to principals when a change of principal is made. This belief is manifested in two practices that we have observed in school districts. First, principals are replaced when schools perform below expectations. The reasoning here echoes the common wisdom that the leader is a major factor in determining the overall performance of an organization. Second, school districts, on the belief that some undefined good will result both for schools and for principals, periodically rotate principals from school to school. Neither of these beliefs has been widely tested. And yet, school districts persist in both practices.

A second consideration that points to the importance of understanding the dynamics of changing principals is that we are entering a period of increased turnover in the ranks of the principalship. Over the next two decades half of the nation's principals will retire and be replaced (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). Confronted with such widespread turnover the educational community will likely welcome information about the problems and benefits that accompany the replacement of principals. Thus, research on what occurs in schools when a change of principal is made can serve to inform practice regarding a most timely issue.

Background and Conceptual Framework

In seeking a conceptual framework to guide this study, we found the literature on leader succession and the literature on organizational cognition to be instructive. A review of the leader succession literature revealed that most research examined relationships between structural variables. For example, early work tended to focus on the effects of organizational factors, such as size, on various dimensions of succession, including frequency (Grusky, 1961; Kriesberg, 1962; Becker & Gordon, 1964). More recent work has focused on the influence

of organizational variables, such as stability of organizations' performance environments (Brown, 1982), on the relationship of leader succession and organizational performance. Most recently, however, research has begun to describe patterns across the interpretations that individual organizational members attach to leader succession. The emergence of this interpretive perspective reflects the general rise in interest among organization theorists and researchers in the cultural dimension of organizations.

In reviewing the literature on organizational culture, Smircich (1983) identified five themes, one of which is the treatment of organizations as cognitive systems, or systems of knowledge. As Weick (1979, 42) explains, from the cognitive perspective an "organization is a body of thought thought by thinking thinkers." That is, organizations are systems of shared meanings or knowledge structures that influence the manner in which members enact and interpret information. Calder and Schurr (1981) speculate that the construct of knowledge structure, or schema, may provide the long sought bridge between organizational and individual levels of analysis. Two assumptions in which the cognitive perspective is rooted suggest two specific elements of that bridge: that individual cognition, framed within organizational cognitive structures, is linked to action (Smircich, 1983) and that actions taken by powerful members can influence organizational structures (Bartunek, 1984; Daft & Weick, 1984).

Research conducted from a cognitive perspective, then, should provide insights to two dimensions of organizataions' responses to leader successions. First, it should contribute to a deeper understanding of the differences in responses to succession observed in previous leader succession studies. For example, it might help to explain why some organizations perform better after successions, while others perform more poorly. Second, the concept of organizational cognition may help to explicate the process by which successors alter the operation and structure of organizations.

Review of the Succession Literature

Although few researchers have expressly sought to describe the manner in which organizational members make sense of leader successions, the findings of studies reaching back to the origins of research on leader succession suggest three things. First, it is apparent that differences exist in the sense made of different succession events. Second, contextual factors affect sensemaking. Third, pre-succession factors influence post-succession sensemaking.

Variation in sensemaking. The findings of a variety of studies suggest that differences do exist in the way that organizational members make sense of leader succession. For example, one can infer from the findings of research that subordinates

have interpreted successions alternatively as: threatening existing norms regarding manager-subordinate relations (Gouldner, 1954) or reinforcing them (Guest, 1958); signaling the continuation of existing operations or marking the intention to make changes (Carlson, 1962); a positive event to be embraced (Goldman & Fraas,1965; Grusky, 1969; Hollander & Julian, 1978) or a negative and threatening occurence to be combated (Jackson,1953).

Contextual influences on sensemaking. What is perhaps more significant than the existence of differences in the sense made of succession events is that that such differences can be traced to three contextual dimensions that frame succession events. The findings of research indicate that sensemaking of leader succession may be affected by organizational norms, conditions surrounding the succession and characteristics of the succession process.

Several studies have found that organizational norms greatly influence members' responses to leader succession. More specifically, it is the relationship between existing organizational norms and the behavior of the successor which affects how members interpret succession. Research suggests that there is a tendency for successors to adjust to existing organizational norms (Merei, 1958; Lieberman, 1956). Guest's (1958) study of a change of management in an auto plant indicates that workers responded favorably to succession when this typical pattern held. However, when a successor violated existing norms, as the new manager did in Gouldner's (1954) study of a gypsum mine, subordinates responded negatively. Gephart (1978) conducted one of the few studies of sensemaking of a leader succession. He found that members of a graduate student association participated in a "status degradation" ceremony which served to specify the norms with which the predecessor was not complying and that served as criteria for selecting a successor. Thus, organizational norms can influence sensemaking both before and after a succession occurs.

The effects of the relationship of organizational norms and successor behavior is also reflected in research on the differences that result from successions in which an insider is promoted verus those in which an outsider is appointed. Carlson (1962) conducted one of the few studies of leader succession in schools or school districts. He found that superintendents promoted from within school districts tended to maintain the status quo, while those recruited from outside tended to institute changes. This finding indicates that it may be the relative freedom from existing organizational norms enjoyed by outsiders as well as their possession of organizational norms forged in other districts that enable them to alter the organization and operation of their new school districts.

Research on school climate and on school effectiveness

indicates that norms regarding such issues as administrator-teacher relations (Halpin & Croft, 1962; Likert, 1961), pupil control (Willower, Eidell & Hoy, 1967), and academic achievement (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Phi Delta Kappa, 1980; Rutter, 1979) vary between schools. Following the literature on leader succession, this diversity of norms can be expected to influence the sense made of principal succession. Thus, in the study reported here we examined the relationship between a school's characteristics, particularly its norms, and sensemaking of a succession in the principalship.

Research on leader succession also suggests that a second contextual dimension --circumstances surrounding successions-- influence sensemaking. One condition that has emerged in several studies is whether or not the succession is forced. A forced succession is one in which the predecessor is removed by the organization as the result of a negative assessment of either the predecessor's performance or the organization's performance or both. Gephart (1978) found that organizational members degraded the status of the predecessor to legitimize his imminent removal. In another study of a forced succession, but one in which very different conditions existed, Jackson (1953) observed that the forced succession of leaders of a telephone company's maintenance groups elicited a very negative response from workers toward the successors. Gordon and Rosen (1981) argued that it was not so much that the successions in Jackson's study were forced as it was the infrequency of successions in the company which precipitated the negative response. Another factor that Jackson did not consider was the perceived legitimacy of the successions. This is an important omission. Grusky (1963) hypothesized that reasons for replacement such as death or retirement are perceived as legitimate and, therefore, will be less likely to elicit negative reactions. Gephart's finding that organizational members who participated in the succession process degraded the predecessor's status and idealized the successor's adherence to organizational norms indicates that even a forced succession can be viewed as legitimate if members are involved in the decision to replace a leader.

We noted that principals are sometimes replaced due to dissatisfaction over their schools' performance. However, most successions in the principalship are unforced, resulting from retirement, promotion or periodic rotation. The proportion of unforced successions is likely to increase as the rate of retirements in the ranks of the principalship rises over the next two decades (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). As a result, the comparison of sensemaking in forced versus unforced situations is, perhaps, less meaningful in public schools than it is in the private sector where forced successions are more common. Further, since unforced principal successions are far more numerous than forced ones, research would be more likely to inform practice if it examined unforced successions. Thus, we chose to study

an unforced succession of a principal.

A third contextual dimension that research suggests may influence reponses, including sensemaking, to leader succession is the succession process, itself. For example, Golman and Fraas (1964) concluded that subordinates tended to be more receptive to successors who were viewed as competent and knowledgeable. Similarly, Hollander and Julian (1978) found that subordinates tended to be more receptive to successors who were viewed as competent. They also found that receptiveness was greater when the successor was elected rather than appointed. This echoes our previous comparison of the findings of Gephart's (1978) study in which organizational members removed the predecessor and selected the successor with those of the Jackson (1953) study, in which subordinates apparently did not participate in the succession process. The difference in receptiveness to successors found in these studies may be traced to the legitimizing effect of subordinate participation in the succession process. Finally, Grusky (1969) observed that acceptance of the successor by subordinates was negatively affected when new leaders brought staff members with them into the organization.

In schools there is little variance in two of these three succession process factors. School staffs typically have little input, let alone elective authority, in the selection of a new principal. Appointments of principals are generally made by district administrators (Baltzell & Dentler, 1983). Similarly, principals usually do not have the discretion to bring staff members with them. However, it is possible, if not probable, that characteristics attributed to successors vary across successions. Thus, in considering the impact of process factors we examined the influence of the characteristics attributed to the successor by the faculty on the way in which it interpreted the succession in their school's principalship.

Pre-succession influences. We reported that Gephart (1978) conducted a study of the sense made of a succession by the members of a graduate students' association. Gephart took the interesting tack of studying sensemaking leading up to the succession. He focused on the place of the predecessor in the sensemaking process. This is interesting in that other studies of leader succession almost exclusively ignored the influence pre-succession conditions or behavior. However, Gephart did not examine the relationship of pre and postsuccession sensemaking. If our aim is to understand the influence of sensemaking on organizations, then presuccession sensemaking is an important consideration to the extent that it influences the organization after the succession occurs. Therefore, we considered the effect of presuccession sensemaking on postsuccession sensemaking in the succession of a school principal.

Purpose of The Study

This study served four related purposes. First, we sought to describe how members of the faculty of a public elementary school made sense of an unforced succession of its principal. Second, we attempted to examine the extent to which three contextual dimensions -- organizational norms, conditions surrounding the succession and characteristics of the succession process -- affected sensemaking. Third, we sought to determine the relationship between the sense made by a faculty of a succession before it occurred and sensemaking after the succession was completed. Finally, because little research has been conducted on this subject, we sought to identify other dimensions that frame the sense made of the succession of the principal. This study represents the second of two companion studies. The first study (Fauske & Ogawa, 1984) examined how a faculty made sense of the impending succession of its principal. The findings of that study served to direct our analysis of the relationship of pre and postsuccession sensemaking.

Methods

Because our purpose was to describe how teachers, themselves, made sense of the succession of their principal, we selected research methods that would enable us to learn how teachers thought about and acted towards a succession event. We employed standard field methods and methods of qualitative data analysis to collect and analyze data. In addition, since little is yet known about how teachers make sense of organizational events or the conditions that influence teachers' sensemaking, we designed the study so that we be able to examine emergent themes.

Site Selection

Since this study was a follow-up study, the site was predetermined. We returned to the site in which the study of presuccession sensemaking was conducted. That site was selected because it met three conditions: it was an elementary school, it was clearly perceived that the succession was unforced and the faculty had not been informed that a succession in the principalship would take place. For a complete discussion of the selection procedure please refer to the original study (Fauske & Ogawa, 1984).

Data Collection

We employed three general methods to collect data: observation, interview and collection of school documents. We collected data over the 1983-84 school year. We gathered data in the following, roughly chronological order: interview of the successor-principal, observation of faculty and faculty-principal interaction and final interviews of principal and teachers.

Observation. We collected observational data over the course of the school year. Since we had been on site during the last ten weeks of the previous school year, we were already familiar with both the physical properties of the site and the faculty. We focused our attention on teacher and teacher-principal interaction to trace events that comprised the succession process and to describe faculty responses to the new principal. Because the principal was a principal actor in the succession, we shadowed his activity on occasion. We spent an average of five hours per week on site. Observations were made during various hours of the school day and in a variety of locations (e.g., the faculty room, hallways and the area around the principal's office).

Interviews. We interviewed the principal twice and members of the faculty once during the course of this study. Since our objective was to determine how participants made sense of the succession, we asked open ended questions which were supplemented with probes. Our aim in the initial interview of the principal was to obtain background information on his education, experience and his intentions for the school year. This first interview was conducted during the second week of the school year. We interviewed the principal again during the last month of the school year. There, we sought to determine what he thought had transpired

We chose to not interview teachers at the beginning of the year because we had already interviewed them about how they viewed the impending succession. Thus, we interviewed all members of the faculty during the last month of the school year. We sought to determine how they viewed the succession, after a year's experience with the new principal. We also interviewed a secretary who was new to the school that year. This was necessary because the position of secretary played a pivotal role in an important succession event. We will discuss this point at length in the findings section.

Beyond the formal interviews, observations were often punctuated by brief, informal conversations with a teacher or the principal. These exchanges were initiated in one of two ways. In some cases, the fieldworker would ask a teacher or the principal for an explanation of an event. In other cases a teacher or the principal would make an unsolicited aside.

Documents. We collected a variety of documents, including agendas of faculty meetings, memoranda and school announcements. Our purpose was to track written evidence of changes in the organization or operation of the school initiated by the successor.

Analysis

The analysis of data occurred in two stages. First, as we began to compile field notes, we began the process of analysis

by tentatively identifying patterns in the principal's responses to being in a new school and the faculty's responses to the successor and his actions. We used these patterns to help frame subsequent observations and the final interviews (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

The second and major stage of analysis occurred after we had left the field site. Working independently, we reviewed field notes, interview notes and documents. We first identified patterns of faculty responses to the succession in both observational and interview data. We sought confirmation of patterns across the three data sets that we had collected (Webb, et al., 1966). We also sought disconfirming evidence for each pattern we identified (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). We than assessed the extent to which patterns in the responses to the succession reflected the three contextual factors thought to influence sensemaking. We also considered the relationship between pre and postsuccession responses. Finally, we sought other factors that might have framed the faculty's sensemaking.

The Setting

The setting for this study was Valley Elementary School, a small elementary school located in the northern part of a large school district which encompasses several suburban communities. Most of Valley School's students are the children of white, suburban, working class families. According to the staff at Valley, families in the area tend to be stable. The small, well groomed tract homes adjacent to the school reflect the social and economic characteristics of their occupants.

The Physical Plant

The facilities of Valley Elementary are rather typical of elementary schools in the area. Built twenty-two years ago,it is a single story building with a low flat roof. A row of large glass windows shaded with venetian blinds is visible across both the front and rear of the building. A wide lawn, concrete sidewalk and customary flagpole appear before the shrubbery bordering the front of the building. An asphalt parking lot is situated at the eastern end of the building, and an expansive asphalt play area with one basketball standard in disrepair is located in the rear. Beyond that lies a large grass covered play area which is bordered on all sides by the backyards of adjacent homes.

Entering through the double glass doors of the main entrance places one in the central module. It houses the multi-purpose room which serves as cafeteria, gymnasium and auditorium, the office area and the faculty lounge. Extending out from this central unit are two long, uncluttered corridors flanked on both sides by classrooms. The classrooms in the eastern corridor

are home to grades two through six, while the western corridor contains classes for grades two through kindergarten. Like most elementary schools, the corridor walls of Valley Elementary are covered with students' artwork and a variety of handmade posters.

The Faculty

The faculty of Valley Elementary School is comprised of twenty classroom teachers, one of whom is a half-time kindergarten teacher, and two special education resource teachers. In addition, a media coordinator, a psychologist and social worker visit Valley School on a regular basis. Four men and sixteen women make up the teaching corp.

Valley School's faculty is generally an experienced and stable group. Their experience in the profession ranges from one to twenty years, while their tenure at Valley ranges from one to sixteen years. Most are products of the local area. Two teachers are new to the school.

The Principal

Valley Elementary School's new principal, Dr. Hamilton, has worked in the district for twenty-three years. He began his educational career as a junior high social studies teacher. He moved to the high school level where he also taught social studies. After having taught on the secondary level for four years, Dr. Hamilton moved to the elementary level to prepare himself for a career in administration. The move to an elementary school was necessary since most administrators in the district begin their administrative careers as principals of elementary schools. After teaching at the elementary level for two years Dr. Hamilton received his first appointment as principal of an elementary school. Over the span of seventeen years, Dr. Hamilton has served as the principal of three elementary schools. Valley is his fourth.

Dr. Hamilton has earned three degrees: a bachelor's degree in secondary education, a master's degree in secondary administration and a doctorate in educational administration. All of his degrees were earned at the same, local university. Dr. Howell is a local product. He was born, raised, educated and pursued his professional career in the local area.

Findings

In this section we present our findings. We begin by describing the factors that seem to have framed faculty sensemaking. Then we describe the manner in which the faculty of Valley Elementary School made sense of the succession of its principal and how sensemaking was influenced by a variety of frames.

Frameworks of Sensemaking

Once we identified patterns in faculty sensemaking, we sought to determine the extent to which those patterns were framed either by factors that the literature suggests influence participants' responses to succession (i.e., organizational norms, presuccession sensemaking, circumstances surrounding the succession and the succession process) or by factors that emerged from the analysis of our data.

We acknowledge that a second order analysis such as this presents problems not encountered in the first order description of patterns. The findings of our first order analysis are directly rooted in observational and interview data. However, our second order analysis involved the matching of patterns found in the first order analysis with predetermined and emergent constructs. Thus, the second order analysis is conducted one level of abstraction removed from the field data. Given this limitation, the findings reported below are speculative.

We found that several factors did frame how the faculty of Valley Elementary School made sense of the succession of its principal. Sensemaking was framed by two general factors: teachers' views of succession and the norms of Valley Elementary School. Both general factors colored faculty sensemaking before the succession occurred, which, in turn, greatly influenced how the faculty made sense of events that occurred during the succession process (see Figure 1). Two of the frames expected to influence faculty sensemaking -- circumstances surrounding the succession and the succession process -- were not found to greatly influence how teachers interpreted succession events.

Succession. The first and most general factor that influenced how teachers made sense of the succession of its principal lies in how they generally viewed succession. It is very simple. Teachers assumed that a change of principal would bring changes in the school. Scattered throughout the data are indications that teachers attributed a great deal of credit to the principal for the character of the school. Some suggested that broad program changes could only be initiated by the principal. Others mentioned that a principal can give a school a sense of unity or set the tone for the entire school by emphasizing certain programmatic dimensions.

Thus, the faculty assumed that a change of principal would bring significant changes to the school. As we will show, this strongly influenced how teachers ultimately made sense of the events that transpired after the succession occurred.

Organizational norms. The results of our study are consistent with the findings of earlier research which suggest that organizational norms and their relationship to the behavior of the

successor can influence the sense made of succession by organizational members. Based on the study of presuccession sensemaking we know that five norms characterized Valley Elementary School (Fauske & Ogawa, 1984). First, Valley Elementary is an orderly school. Orderliness extends from its physical appearance to expectations for teacher and student behavior to the manner in which school business is conducted. Second, teachers' instructional activities are conducted in isolation. Neither the predecessor principal nor other teachers exerted significant influence on how members of the faculty taught. Third, a great deal of emphasis was placed on achievement test scores. Test scores were employed to judge the relative performance of the school and individual classes, to select students for involvement in a computer class and to provide information about a student with behavioral problems. Fourth, relationships between the predecessor principal and teachers were impersonal. Fifth, acquiescence to the influence of forces external to the school, namely the district and parents, was emphasized at Valley. Combined with the expectation that the succession would result in change, these five norms colored faculty sensemaking of succession events.

Presuccession sensemaking. The antecedents of postsuccession sensemaking were evident in how the faculty made sense of the succession before it had occurred. The findings of this study's companion study (Fauske & Ogawa, 1984) showed that two themes characterized presuccession sensemaking. First, there was fear. Teachers feared the uncertainty that accompanied the succession, and, more specifically, they feared a loss of autonomy in instructional matters. Second, teachers were hopeful. They hoped that the new principal would bring a personableness to his relationships with teachers, support teachers and bring a sense of unity to the school.

The themes that characterized presuccession sensemaking reflect both of the two general frames described above: succession and school norms. The general fear of uncertainty and the more specific fears and hopes expressed by the faculty reflect an expectation that significant changes would accompany the succession of the principal. Further, the specific issues on which fears and hopes were focused reflect the existing norms of the school. Generally, teachers feared the violation of a norm with which they were comfortable, instructional autonomy. On the other hand they hoped that norms they found to be disquieting would be replaced. For example, teachers hoped that the new principal would bring a personableness to his relationships with teachers.

The Sense Made of The Succession

The faculty of Valley Elementary School went through three phases in its making sense of the succession of its principal.

The first occurred over the first three to four months of the school year preceding the Christmas break. During that phase, teachers were largely very positive about the new principal and his actions. The second phase began just prior to the Christmas break and continued through February. Precipitated by the replacement of the school's secretary, the faculty began to mistrust the principal's intentions. The third phase might best be described as settling in; teachers began to adjust to the new situation.

Phase one. The first phase was a period of initial enchantment. We know from the study of presuccession sensemaking that while teachers feared the uncertainty of change, they generally approached the succession with optimism. They hoped that the successor would be a personable individual who would support teachers and provide a sense of unity in the school (Fauske & Ogawa, 1984). At first, teachers seem to have been very much taken with Dr. Hamilton, their new principal. His reputation as a "teacher's principal" (Fauske & Ogawa, 1984) had preceded him. And, it seems that the faculty's initial impression was that the reputation was deserved. The teachers perceived three qualities in the successor that led them to this initial conclusion: leadership, a warm personality and the ability to negotiate successfully with the district on behalf of the faculty.

Both before and after the succession, several teachers indicated in their interviews that they hoped that the new principal would provide leadership. For example, one teacher hoped that the new principal would give Valley Elementary a "sense of unity". Another explained that "program changes can only come from the top (referring to the principal)."

During this first phase of sensemaking, several teachers believed that Dr. Hamilton would provide the leadership they sought. This belief was rooted in a variety of events. One series of events showed the principal's apparent willingness to make decisions. In his initial interview he explained that his style was to consult teachers and then make decisions himself. This style was made evident in the first few faculty meetings of the school year. Whether the issue involved the acquisition of equipment for the school or schedules for monitoring the playground and hallways during recesses and lunch, Dr. Hamilton sought the advice of teachers but did not make decisions during the meetings.

Another set of events established the principal's seeming willingness to exert his authority in relations with teachers. For example, in one instance a teacher who had a reputation for being a maverick had failed to take up her post to monitor the hallways during recess. After checking the schedule and the halls, Dr. Hamilton found the missing teacher in the teachers' lounge and asked her if she wasn't scheduled to monitor the halls. After the teacher thanked the principal for reminding

her and left the lounge, another teacher remarked, "At least this year it's the principal that reminds you."

Perhaps the most compelling quality of the principal as viewed by the teachers was his friendly manner. Every teacher responded in their interviews that they were struck by Dr. Hamilton's attention to personal relations. The following is a sample of their comments: "I've had principals walk past me in the hall and not say 'hello!' Not Dr. Hamilton." "He's one of the few principals who shakes hands. More of a personal contact." "We joke around in the hall. He seems always pleasant." These comments were borne out by our observations. The successor paid a great deal of attention to his personal relationships with his faculty. For example, at the initial faculty meeting in August, he introduced himself and then asked the teachers to introduce themselves. After the last introduction was made, Dr. Hamilton proceeded to recite the names of all the teachers. During the first phase of sensemaking, the teachers made much of their new principal's personable nature.

The final characteristic attributed by the faculty to the successor that endeared him to them was his ability to negotiate in their behalf with the school district's central office. This conclusion was based on one event, the acquisition of a duplicating machine. At the beginning of the year Dr. Hamilton asked teachers to submit lists of materials or equipment that were needed. He indicated in a faculty meeting in September that he would try to obtain at least some of the requested equipment. As one teacher recalled, "We got a ditto machine. I really felt like he was going to do things."

Beyond these three positive attributions, the faculty found the few changes made by the successor to be largely insignificant. They expressed some relief that Dr. Hamilton did not interfere with their teaching. A majority of the teachers also indicated that they were glad to find that achievement test scores and "magazine test" scores would be deemphasized. Teachers thought changes in assembly seating, cafeteria procedures and the supply requisitioning system to be unimportant.

The faculty even accepted a change in the policy concerning when and where students would enter and leave the building. At first teachers resisted the change. When discussing the issue during a faculty meeting in October, teachers voiced concerns about supervising the students before classess began and the possibility of disruptive behavior. Teachers also voiced their objections during informal conversations in the faculty room: "If I can walk ten blocks to school, the kids can walk the length of the building." Despite the teachers' reservations, the principal changed the procedures. The teachers later acknowledged that the change hadn't affected them to any great degree, but took some pleasure in the fact that the principal had decided in

February to reverse his decision because students had "abused the priviledge".

During the first three months of the school year, then, the faculty of Valley Elementary School saw its new principal in a highly favorable light. He was personable, seemed to provide leadership, negotiated successfully with the environment and did not interfere with teachers' classroom practices. The enchantment of teachers with the new principal was rooted firmly in the frameworks provided by their view of succession, school norms and the resulting presuccession sensemaking.

The expectation that the succession would bring significant changes to the school coupled with the school norms led teachers to fear the loss of autonomy but hope for a principal who would be personable, support them against environmental intrusions and provide leadership. During the first phase of sensemaking the faculty found that their fears had been unwarranted while their hopes were fulfilled. The new principal did not interfere with teachers' instructional practices. On the other hand, he was seen as an improvement over his predecessor. He was personable; he negotiated successfully with the environment; and he seemed willing to provide leadership.

As the first phase of sensemaking drew to a close the faculty was apparently beginning to settle in. However, in December the school's secretary was transferred. This precipitated a marked change in the sense made of the succession of the principal.

Phase two. If the first phase of sensemaking was characterized by a sense of enchantment, the second phase marked a period of disenchantment, the seeds of which were partially sown earlier. Just prior to the Christmas break, it was announced that the school's full-time secretary, Flo, would be leaving Valley Elementary School for a similar position in another of the district's schools. Flo had worked at Valley for eighteen years and had developed strong relationships with most of the faculty. One teacher observed: "Flo is a widow. This school was her family; these people were her friends. She only has two years to go before retiring. She couldn't afford to fight him."

All of the teachers concluded that the secretary had been removed by the new principal. They believed that this was the result of conflict between Dr. Hamilton and the secretary over various office procedures. The following quotes are representative: "There was conflict between Dr. Hamilton and Flo...She had a set way of doing things and he felt that she was a little firm and resistant to change." "When the secretary went, talking to her, she didn't do it exactly the way he wanted it done." "He pushed her out, because he decided from day one that he was in charge and she took too much responsibility."

Teachers' perceptions were corroborated by comments made by the principal both before and after the secretary was transferred. During our initial interview of the new principal in September, he responded to a question about his goals for the school year by saying, "The Secretary has too much control at the front desk... We (he and the office staff) are here to serve the teachers. In the past it's been more like control." Later, in October Dr. Hamilton commented that he thought that the rule prohibiting students from entering and exiting through the school's main entrance stemmed from the secretary's desire not to be bothered. He referred to his earlier comment about the secretary having too much power. Then, after the decision had been made to transfer the secretary to another school, Dr. Hamilton made the following observation during a conversation in the faculty room: "She had been here for almost twenty years...You're bound to start thinking of everything as yours, that you know more than everyone else."

After just three months, the period of enchantment was over. The immediate reaction was anger. As one teacher reflected: "If it came down to the principal or Flo, we'd pick Flo." Another commented: "He really got rude..."

The anger gave way to insecurity. Most of the teachers feared that the transfer of the secretary indicated how the principal would deal with other staff members, including teachers, who did not go along with his program. The fact that teachers were unclear about the principal's expectations contributed to their feelings of insecurity. "Everyone is uneasy about where they stand. The action with Flo precipitated this." "He likes to use his authority and show who's boss, and I agree with that. But everyone was sure scared after the Flo thing." "I don't really know what he thinks of me; that's the hardest thing. I don't know if I am approved of." "I wonder what he's watching for. How do we know if he's going to boot you out for not meeting expectations." "I don't feel like I know where I stand. With Mr. Brown (the predecessor) I knew what he expected."

The disenchantment experienced by the teachers in this phase of sensemaking was framed to a great extent by their general view of succession and one event that occurred during the succession process, the transfer of the school secretary. Teachers assumed that the succession would bring significant changes to Valley. However, the principal did not make changes that affected teachers. Nor did he make known his expectations for the performance of teachers. This resulted in an atmosphere of uncertainty about the nature of changes that would be forthcoming.

Then, the school's secretary was transferred because she did not readily adopt office procedures implemented by the new principal. It seems that teachers concluded that this would be the approach that the principal would take in dealing with

staff members who didn't meet his expectations. In the absence of known expectations, insecurity spread throughout the faculty.

After the feelings of distrust emerged, other negative attitudes towards the principal found expression. The connection between the insecurity spawned by the secretary's leaving and the emerging criticism is not clear. What is clear is the chronological order of events, that teachers began to be critical of the principal after the secretary had been transferred. The criticism focused on three general issues: socio-economic status, a self-serving attitude and absence from campus. Each of these issues is related to a question of the principal's commitment to Valley Elementary and its faculty.

Half of the teachers commented that they felt that socio-economic status stood between their new principal and the school. Here, a little background is needed. As we indicated the district in which Valley Elementary School is located is large and encompasses several suburban communities. These communities vary widely in the socio-economic status of their residents. Wealthy professionals and business people can be found in some neighborhoods, while recently laid-off workers reside in others. Traditionally, the wealthier neighborhoods are found in the southern end of the district, while working class neighborhoods are located in the north. Antagonism between the south and the north has often colored district politics.

Valley Elementary serves a working class community in the center of the northern half of the valley. Many of the teachers on Valley's faculty live near the school. In contrast, Dr. Hamilton lives on the southern side of the valley. His previous school was in the south. Teachers grew to believe that their new principal did not like being at a northside school: "Maybe, just maybe, it was a letdown to come here from the southside. We're hoping that changes. It's kind of a step down in prestige." "Out here, if I hear him say, 'out here' one more time..." "I don't know how happy he is here...I don't know if we're too far west."

Most teachers traced the principal's perceived reluctance to being at Valley to social and economic distance. This is clearly reflected in the following remarks made by teachers: "He's more interested in the fact that he lives six houses from the boulevard (a wealthy area) and that he plays tennis. I get the idea that it's a cut to be on this side of town." "His tennis and moving back to the southside (are important to him). He's very status conscious and money and having the best of everything." Indeed, our observations revealed that Dr. Hamilton often talked about tennis, sometimes indicating that his opponents were high profile members of the community (e.g., the president of a local university). Also, on several occasions we overheard him arranging tennis dates on his office phone. Further, Dr. Hamil-

ton regularly spoke with various teachers about his boat, his southside home and the new automobile he had just purchased. In one conversation with a teacher he remarked, "My wife didn't like the first one (new car) I brought home. I took it back, got another. It cost four thousand dollars more. The music system's worth one thousand dollars!" The teacher responded, "My car wouldn't even get four thousand dollars."

About a fourth of the teachers indicated that the principal's attention to social status caused him to favor some teachers in the school over others. As one teacher observed, "He's a snob! He likes some teachers better than others. It sort of depends on what we do in our leisure time, what college we went to, where we live." While this was not a dominant sentiment, it underscores the sense of social distance that grew between the principal and large portions of his faculty.

Another theme in the faculty's criticism of Dr. Hamilton concerned what they perceived to be his self-serving attitude. Half of the teachers noted that the principal was very concerned with how he looked to the school's various constituencies. As one teacher stated it, "(He wants to) make himself look good...To everybody: parents and the community. He wants it to come across that he's doing good...He's concerned about his own image." Faculty and staff indicated that much of what the principal emphasized in school resulted from his efforts to place himself in a good light with district officials and parents. For example, several teachers and staff members noted that he was a stickler about teacher absenteeism. One staff member recalled that he "had teachers with pneumonia but he got upset (over their absences)." A teacher remarked that when the principal had visited her in the hospital, "He didn't ask about my condition, but said, 'I thought you and I were going to be the ones who weren't going to be absent.' " A staff member concluded that the principal was concerned about absenteeism because "He wants us to look good in the eyes of the district...When reports come back (from the district), this upset him...It's important that he looks good to teachers, district and parents." Another remarked, "It puts a bad light on him when we have the most absences at our school."

Several teachers and staff members also reported that the principal was very concerned about his relationship with the school's Parent Teacher Association. Two teachers reported that they had heard that the principal had had problems with the PTA at one of his previous schools. Another felt that he favored the PTA's side when that PTA and faculty were at odds over an issue. Some teachers believed that the removal of the secretary was precipitated by a complaint from a PTA officer. Others understood that the decision to change the time and locations for student entry to the building against protests from the faculty was in response to a request from the PTA. In fact,

the principal did place a call to the PTA President to apprise her of his decision to rescind the change of policy and to "check" with her. This conversation occurred before he discussed the issue with his faculty. On another occasion, the principal supported a PTA instigated citizenship award over the reservations of his teachers.

The third issue over which teachers criticized the principal was his absence from campus. Teachers and staff members observed that Dr. Hamilton was often away from the school. One teacher reported that, "He ususally leaves after recess and comes back before lunch. Then he leaves after lunch and comes back before recess." Another commented, "He's never around when you need him." A staff member observed, "He doesn't want you to be gone, but he leaves when he wants to leave - and that's often." Our observations corroborated these remarks. In fact, the principal was often off campus when we were present to make our observations. In one case, he took a half day off to register his new car. On other occasions he would leave campus to conduct business at the district office, to do school business or to take a "late lunch". When he did leave campus, he would ask the staff to "Be sure to tell people that it wasn't early, it was a late lunch. He doesn't want to give them a bad impression."

In this second phase of sensemaking, the faculty of Valley Elementary grew disenchanted with its new principal. It seems that this was precipitated by the transfer of the secretary to a new school. With the knowledge that the transfer resulted from the secretary's unwillingness to change certain office procedures and without knowledge of the expectations that the principal held for the faculty, many teachers became insecure about their status. This fracture in what had been the development of a positive image of the new principal was followed by the expression of criticism of the principal over three general issues. Much of the faculty felt that the principal did not want to be in their school because it did not reflect his social and economic status. They believed that he bowed to district and PTA influence in order to maintain his own personal image with those constituencies. And, they felt that he spent too much time away from campus.

All of these criticisms point to a question about the extent to which the principal is committed to Valley Elementary School and its faculty. The faculty's sense that the principal did not want to be at Valley because of social and economic distance suggests that teachers felt that he did not identify with the school and the community it served. The belief that the principal's concern for his personal image caused him to be highly sensitive to pressures from the district office and the PTA similarly exposes a feeling among teachers that his personal interests outweighed considerations for the school and its faculty. Finally, the faculty seemed to have taken their principal's absences

from the building as a behavioral confirmation of his lack of commitment.

The relationship of the criticism of the principal's lack of commitment to Valley Elementary School to the factors that we found to generally frame faculty sensemaking is not entirely clear. There does appear to be some connection between the presuccesion sensemaking and this sensitivity to the principal's level of commitment. The faculty had hoped that the successor would be personable, create a sense of unity through his leadership and negotiate with the external environment in behalf of teachers. Each of these qualities suggests a commitment to pursuing the interests of Valley School and its faculty. Personableness reflects a concern for teachers as individuals. The development of school unity results from the pursuit of school interests. And, buffering teachers from environmental influences is a sign of commitment and support for teachers.

One faculty member summarized the first two phases of sensemaking in the following way, "The atmosphere is different. The old principal was not handsome. He was good, kind, decent, deeply concerned about the school at heart. But the teachers were always unhappy. Then there comes this handsome principal. The whole atmosphere changes. The teachers really had high expectations. They lived on hype until the Flo experience. After Christmas, they sort of kept looking over their shoulders to see if they would be next."

Phase three. The third and final phase of sensemaking that we observed was one in which the faculty settled into its situation. After the initial phase of high expectations and perceived promise and the subsequent phase of insecurity, disappointment and criticism, the faculty swallowed its disappointment and went about its work of teaching children. This third phase began in the early spring. The thinking of teachers about the new principal had four themes: changes instituted by the principal did not significantly affect teachers, the principal was biding his time, teachers would isolate themselves in their classrooms and teach and the teachers continued to focus on the principal's friendly personality.

All of the teachers indicated that changes that had been made at Valley School during the year had little or no effect on them. They pointed out that changes in such things as the process for requisitioning materials, the procedures by which students entered and exited the building and the acquisition of a duplicating machine really did not significantly affect their work.

Several teachers explained that the principal was probably biding his time before making significant alterations or introducing new programs. These teachers either believed that it was simply

too soon to expect changes or thought that the principal was sizing up the situation before making changes. The following quotes are illustrative: "We're in a transition...I don't know if he'll float along until he's in a better position." "I don't hear any clear cut goals coming through...I don't know if he's been bogged down with getting familiar." "Maybe he's just getting a feel for the school and community...Ask me in another year or two."

This sense that the principal was biding his time goes back to the frame cast by teachers' general conceptions of succession. They assumed that succession would bring change. Thus, even after an entire year had transpired without significant changes having been made, many continued to assume that changes were forthcoming.

A third theme in teacher sensemaking during the settling in phase helps to both explain why teachers did not feel that changes had affected them and exposes a strategy used by teachers to cope with a troubling situation. It goes back to the norm among teachers that was reflected in the school's norms and presuccession sensemaking, teacher autonomy. The teachers, not surprisingly, reported that they focused their attention on what happened in their classrooms, on teaching students. Thus, changes to procedures that largely involved activities other than classroom instruction were perceived as having little or no effect by teachers. The emphasis placed by teachers on their classrooms and students also provided a strategy by which teachers could cope with a situation they found to be either somewhat threatening in its uncertainty or simply negative. By downplaying the atmosphere in the school outside of their classrooms, teachers could deny the impact of the problems that had emerged during the school year. One teacher commented, "I'm still feeling it out. I just stay in my classroom and do what I'm supposed to be doing." Another said, "I close my door and do my best with what I've got. I tend to handle it myself."

During the settling in phase, despite the insecurity and animosity that had previously grown out of the secretary's transfer, many of the teachers still commented on the principal's personableness. It is interesting to note that both the few teachers who were highly critical of the principal and the few teachers who were supportive mentioned this quality, albeit in very different terms. Those highly critical of the principal characterized the principal's style of interaction as "hype" or "phoney" or commented that he "he's not a really personable man." Supporters, on the other hand, characterized him as "positive, genuine, caring, supportive, patient...I feel like he's my friend" or as a person whose "door is always open if you want to talk with him about things." Between these two extremes, most teachers simply commented on the friendliness of the principal.

The continued emphasis placed on the nature of the principal's interactions with the faculty and staff can be traced back to the school's norms and presuccession sensemaking. This theme, of course, was the dominant one during the enchantment phase of sensemaking.

By the end of the school year the faculty and staff of Valley Elementary School gave evidence of settling into their situation. They felt that changes made over the school year did not affect their central concern, teaching. This buffered those critical of the new principal from what they perceived to be a negative school environment. Other teachers believed that the lack of significant change only meant that the new principal was biding his time, perhaps monitoring the environment, before making changes or introducing programs. Despite the animosity and insecurity that seems to have been spawned by the removal of the school secretary earlier in the year, teachers returned to an impression made by the principal in the first phase of enchantment, that the successor was a personable man. So strong was this image that his critic discredited him by calling it "phoney", while supporters referred to it as "genuine".

Summary

Our purposes in this study were to describe how a faculty of an elementary school made sense of the succession of its principal and to examine how this sensemaking was affected by several factors -- including organizational norms, presuccession sensemaking, cirucmstances surrounding the succession and characteristics of the succession process.

We found that the sensemaking process unfolded in three phases. Teachers began the school year expecting that the succession would bring changes to the school. They feared that these changes might mean the loss of the autonomy they had enjoyed under the predecessor. On the other hand, they hoped that the new principal would be more personable than his predecessor, would be more willing to negotiate with the school's environment in behalf of teachers and would bring a sense of unity to the school through his leadership. During the first phase of sensemaking, the faculty perceived the successor to be a person who fulfilled all of their hopes.

However, the enchantment of the first two months of the school year was shattered by one event. The school secretary, a woman who had worked at Valley for nearly twenty years and had developed close ties with many of the teachers, was transferred to another school. It was understood that she had been transferred because she had been reluctant to adopt office procedures favored by the new principal. Teachers became insecure about their own positions at Valley School. Having assumed that the succession

would bring significant changes and operating without knowledge of the successor's expectations for their performance, teachers feared that they might be removed, as their secretary had, for not complying with some unknown expectation.

After the secretary was transferred, teachers began to view the successor more critically, focusing particularly on his apparent lack of commitment to Valley Elementary School and the faculty. Like the initial enchantment, the disenchantment was rooted in the faculty's hopes that the succession would bring positive changes to their school. Teachers sensed that the new principal felt a social and econmic distance from this school that served a working class community. They thought that his efforts to maintain a positive relationship with school district officials and the Parent Teacher Association were self-serving. And, they noted his frequent absences from the school.

By the spring, the faculty began to settle into its situation. Teachers retreated to the isolation of their classrooms. Some believed that changes would still come, that the principal was simply biding his time. In the end, the teachers, both the supporters and detractors of the new principal, continued to focus on his personableness.

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